

Protecting Maryland through Active Surveillance of Returning Health Care Workers and Other Travelers from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea

Background

The outbreak of Ebola virus infection in the West African nations of Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone is a public health crisis requiring a global response. The doctors, nurses, and other health care workers traveling to West Africa are heroes working to protect all of us from the continued spread of this epidemic.

In order to be prepared for potential Ebola cases in Maryland, state health, hospital, and EMS officials have been working together for several months. The state's response plan -- developed in coordination with experts from Johns Hopkins, the University of Maryland, the National Institutes of Health, and others -- is based on the science of the Ebola Virus, including:

- The virus can only be transmitted through exposure to the bodily fluids of someone who is ill with infection.
- People without symptoms cannot transmit the virus.
- Infection can occur for up to 21 days post exposure.

Maryland Policy

Beginning Monday, October 27, Maryland health officials will conduct daily monitoring and will require certain restrictions for all travelers from the West African nations where the Ebola outbreak has been occurring.

Individuals at high or some risk of infection will sign agreements outlining certain restrictions, and other travelers will receive daily monitoring and will be alert for signs and symptoms of possible infection. At any time -- in case of noncompliance, or if necessary for the public health -- the state may issue a specific public health order.

The level of monitoring and restrictions, including planned and unannounced home visits, will be based on the potential risk. Specifically:

- Home restriction for individuals at "high risk." Individuals with a known exposure to Ebola virus, such as through a splash of body fluid on exposed skin or a needle-stick injury will remain at home for the 21-day period and will be closely monitored.

- Activity restriction for individuals at “some risk.” Health care workers who were wearing personal protective equipment during care for patients with Ebola virus are at “some risk.” They will refrain from attending mass gatherings and using public transportation, will refrain from traveling long distances without approval from health department officials, and will also be closely monitored by state and local health officials.

Statements of Support

“We are pleased to see the measured approach that Maryland is implementing to assess healthcare workers returning from West Africa. We applaud the efforts of these healthcare workers who are putting their personal safety at risk and want to ensure that they are appropriately monitored to protect themselves and the citizens of Maryland.”

-- Dr. Paul Rothman, Dean of the Medical Faculty, CEO, Johns Hopkins Medicine

“The University of Maryland Medical System supports this balanced, science-based approach. We also appreciate the cooperative engagement among the three health systems and DHMH in our statewide preparedness effort.”

-- Jeffrey Rivest, President and CEO of the University of Maryland Medical Center

"MedStar Health fully supports the policy expressed by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene regarding health care workers returning from volunteer work in West Africa. It is a well thought-out approach that balances the important work being done by caregivers from our region working relentlessly in the affected areas of West Africa to care for those with Ebola with the imperative of protecting the health of our community."

-- Dr. David Mayer, Vice President, Quality and Safety, MedStar Health

“The state's policy strikes a critical balance between the need to closely monitor potential high- and medium-risk health care workers, and the need to have the right number of health care providers available to quell the virus at its source in West Africa and to take care of potential Ebola patients here in Maryland”

-- Carmela Coyle, Executive Director of the Maryland Hospital Association